

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 5180

FOL TEL SENT ACTION BANGKOK INFO VIENTIANE FROM UDORN DATED
MARCH 9, 1977 REPEATED FOR YOUR INFO

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L UDORN 0052

E.O: 11652 GDS
TAGS: PINT, LA, TH
SUBJECT: FORMER OFFICIALS COMMENT ON SITUATION IN LAOS

SUMMARY: CONOFF RECENTLY INTERVIEWED FORMER HIGH RANKING LPDR
MFA OFFICIAL CHANSAMONE VONGSAPHAY, WHO HAS FLED TO THAILAND,
REGARDING GENERAL SITUATION IN LAOS. CHANSAMONE'S COMMENTS
COVER A VARIETY OF TOPICS RANGING FROM POPULAR ATTITUDES TOWARDS
LPDR REGIME TO LAO/US RELATIONS. TWO POINTS HE EMPHASIZES ARE
EXISTENCE OF WIDESPREAD POPULAR DISENCHANTMENT WITH COMMUNIST
RULE AND PERVASIVE VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE IN SENIOR RULING CIRCLES
OF LPDR. CONREP ALSO INTERVIEWED FORMER PRESIDENT OF LAO NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY OUANE SENANIKONE, ANOTHER RECENT REFUGEE ARRIVAL IN
NORTHEAST, BUT HE HAD NOTHING OF SUBSTANCE TO ADD TO CHANSAMONE'S
REMARKS. END SUMMARY.
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1. CONOFF MET FEBRUARY 22 AND MARCH 1 WITH LAO REFUGEE
CHANSAMONE VONGSAPHAY, FORMER DIRECTOR OF NON-ALLIGNED AFFAIRS,
LPDR MFA, TO DISCUSS GENERAL SITUATION IN LAOS. CHANSAMONE
COMMENTED ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS DURING CONVERSATIONS.
2. HE ASSERTED THAT DISSATISFACTION WITH COMMUNIST REGIME IS
WIDESPREAD AMONG POPULATION, RANGING FROM NON-PATHET LAO (PL)
OFFICIALS IN GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES TO FARMERS IN FIELDS.
PUBLIC DISSILLUSIONMENT WITH COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT, HE CLAIMED,
STEMS FROM A VARIETY OF FACTORS INCLUDING UNPOPULAR GOVERNMENT

POLICIES SUCH AS NEW AGRICULTURAL TAX AND TREATMENT ACCORDED FAMILIES OF DETAINEES IN VIENG XAY, INEFFICIENCY AND CORRUPTION OF LOWER AND MIDDLE-RANKING PL OFFICIALS, AND GRADUALLY INCREASING REGIMENTATION OF LIFE IN NEW LAO SOCIETY. HE NOTED THAT MOST VISIBLE SIGN OF POPULAR DISCONTENT IS CONTINUED ARMED RESISTANCE TO LPDR AUTHORITIES IN VARIOUS PARTS OF COUNTRY. HE ADDED THAT DISCONTENT IS ALSO MANIFESTED IN LISTLESS COOPERATION OF PEOPLE WITH GOVERNMENT AND INCREASINGLY SARCASTIC REFERENCE TO GOVERNMENT POLICIES BY ATTENDEES OF LARGE PUBLIC SEMINARS IN VIENTIANE. CHANSAMONE MAINTAINED THAT LEVEL OF POPULAR UNREST IS NOW HIGH ENOUGH THAT A NEW, STRONG LEADER COULD IGNITE IT TO LAUNCH A SUCCESSFUL REBELLION AGAINST COMMUNIST RULE.

3. CHANSAMONE CLAIMED THAT INFLUENCE OF VIETNAMESE IN VIENTIANE IS PREDOMINATE. SOVIETS MAINTAIN A LARGE PUBLIC PRESENCE IN LAOS IN TERMS OF PERSONNEL, EQUIPMENT, AND MATERIAL AID BUT THEIR INFLUENCE DOES NOT APPROACH THAT OF VIETNAMESE, ACCORDING TO CHANSAMONE. HE SAID THAT VIETNAMESE WORK QUIETLY AND INCONSPICUOUSLY OUT OF PUBLIC VIEW AS POLITICAL ADVISORS TO KEY LAO PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (LPRP) PERSONNEL AND DECISION-MAKING BODIES. HE STATED FURTHER THAT VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE IN MINISTRY OF DEFENSE AND LPLA IS ALSO EXTENSIVE, WITH VIETNAMESE ADVISORS ASSIGNED AS LOW AS BATTALION LEVELS IN SOME ELEMENTS OF LATTER ORGANIZATION. HE SAID THAT NVA TROOPS ARE DEPLOYED IN SAVANNAKHET AND OTHER AREAS OF COUNTRY BUT NOT IN VIENTIANE. CONFIDENTIAL

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CHANSAMONE STATED THAT STRONG VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE AT HIGHEST LEVELS OF LPDR CONTINUES TO BE SOURCE OF MAJOR DIVISION AMONG SENIOR LAO LEADERS, BETWEEN THOSE WHO VIEW INTIMATE VIETNAMESE TIES AS PRACTICAL NECESSITY, AND THOSE WHO BELIEVE IT THREATENS LAOS' INTEGRITY AND INDEPENDENCE.

4. WITH REGARD TO VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS TOWARDS THAILAND CHANSAMONE STATED THAT HE IS CONVINCED THAT VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PARTY (VCP) IS PROVIDING COVERT ASSISTANCE TO COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND (CPT), NOTING THAT HE HAD BEEN BRIEFED IN HIS CAPACITY AS MFA OFFICIAL TO THAT EFFECT. HE CLAIMED THAT VCP'S PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IN THIS REGARD OVER NEXT 3-5 YEARS IS TO PROVIDE CPT, THROUGH ASSISTANCE OF PL, WITH NOTABLY EXPANDED SUPPORT AND SANCTUARY BASES IN LAOS AS SPUR TO CPT'S EFFORTS TO LIBERATE NORTHEAST.

5. CHANSAMONE NOTED WITH REGARD TO RESISTANCE SITUATION THAT IT IS DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE, LIKE HIMSELF, RESIDING IN VIENTIANE TO OBTAIN MUCH ACCURATE INFORMATION ABOUT RESISTANCE ACTIVITIES. HE STATED THAT ON BASIS OF BRIEF TRIPS TO SAVANNAKHET AND PAKSE DURING PAST EIGHT MONTHS IT APPEARS THAT RESISTANCE IS ACTIVE IN THOSE AREAS. HE CLAIMED THAT PL HAS CONFISCATED ARMS FROM LOCAL MILITIA IN SAVANNAKHET BECAUSE THEY DO NOT TRUST THEM. HIS MOTHER, WHO RESIDES IN PAKSE, TOLD HIM LAST AUGUST THAT IT IS NOT SAFE FOR PL TO VENTURE FAR FROM TOWN, PARTICULARLY AFTER

DAYLIGHT HOURS. CHANSAMONE REMARKED, HOWEVER, THAT RESISTANCE SORELY NEEDS A SINGLE, CAPABLE LEADER WHO HAS NOT BEEN TAINTED BY ASSOCIATION WITH FORMER RIGHT-WING REGIMES.

6. CHANSAMONE SAID THAT AS FAR AS HIS WORK IN MFA WAS CONCERNED, ANY MATTER OF IMPORTANCE, PARTICULARLY IF IT RELATED TO POLICY CONCERNS, WAS DECIDED BY A SMALL GROUP OF LPDR FOREIGN POLICY EXPERTS OPERATING OUTSIDE OF FOREIGN MINISTRY IN OFFICE OF PM KAYSONE PHOUMIVAN. HE STATED THAT CAREER DIPLOMATS HAVE LITTLE OR NO INPUT INTO SUCH DECISIONS. HE STATED FURTHER THAT ALL SENIOR DEPARTMENT HEADS IN MFA, EXCEPT FOR PRESS AND ADMIN
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DEPARTMENTS, ARE NOW PL OFFICIALS. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THESE OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN FORCED, DUE TO LACK OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE, TO RELY LARGELY ON CAREER STAFF TO HANDLE DAY TO DAY AFFAIRS OF RUNNING DEPARTMENTS. HE ADDED THAT AMONG CAREER STAFF THERE ARE FEW SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS BECAUSE NO ONE KNOWS WHO HE CAN TRUST. HE SAID THAT MORALE AMONG NON-PL OFFICIALS IS VERY LOW.

7. WITH REGARD TO U.S., CHANSAMONE STATED IT IS HIS IMPRESSION LPDR WANTS TO MAINTAIN CURRENT LIMITED LEVEL OF CONTACT WITH USG IN HOPE THAT, WITH PASSAGE OF TIME, RELATIONS BETWEEN LAOS AND U.S. WILL GRADUALLY IMPROVE TO POINT WHERE WASHINGTON CAN BE PERSUADED TO PROVIDE SUBSTANTIAL AID.

8. CONREP ALSO VISITED FEBRUARY 25 FORMER LAOTIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT OUANE SENANIKONE WHO HAS RECENTLY SOUGHT REFUGE IN NONG KHAI. OUANE IS IN HIS MID-SIXTIES AND BEDRIDDEN, SUFFERING FROM A SERIOUS LIVER AILMENT, APPARENTLY RESULT OF EXCESSIVE CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL, AND DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE MUCH LONGER TO LIVE. HE ECHOED CHANSAMONE'S COMMENTS ABOUT WIDESPREAD UNHAPPINESS OF GENERAL POPULATION WITH COMMUNIST REGIME. HE HAD LITTLE OF INTEREST TO OFFER ABOUT NATURE OF VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE IN LPDR OR RESISTANCE SITUATION. WHEN

QUERIED REGARDING HIS FUTURE PLANS, OUANE STATED THAT HE PLANNED TO REMAIN IN TXAHTEND INDEFINITELY FOR VARIETY OF REASONS, INCLUDING HOPE OF PROVIDING OVERALL LEADERSHIP TO RESISTANCE STRUGGLE.

9. COMMENT: EWE HAVE NOT SEEN ANY SOLID EVIDENCE TO DATE TO SUPPORT CHANSAMONE'S OBSERVATION THAT POPULAR DISCONTENT IN LAOS IS NOW SUFFICIENTLY STRONG TO SUPPORT A FULL-SCALE REBELLION AGAINST COMMUNIST RULE. SUCH AN OBSERVATION SEEMS EXAGGERATED. WHILE CHANSAMONE IS WELL EDUCATED AND ARTICULATE, HE APPEARS TO US TO BE THOROUGHLY DISILLUSIONED WITH LIFE IN LPDR AND STRONGLY ANTI-VIETNAMESE. HIS REMARKS, THEREFORE, SHOULD BE
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EVALUATED IN THAT CONTEXT. OUANE IMPRESSES US AS INDIVIDUAL
DIFFICULT TO TAKE SERIOUSLY BECAUSE AGE AND SICKNESS SEEM TO
HAVE SLACKENED HIS GRIP ON REALITY.
FINNEY UNQTE WHITEHOUSE

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